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Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001300010051-5

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600  
16 October 1966

NSA review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

Communist military forces inflicted heavy losses this weekend on ARVN Rangers operating near Saigon and on Vietnamese paramilitary troops defending a district headquarters in Binh Thuan Province. Hanoi has labeled Defense Secretary McNamara's optimistic appraisal of the Vietnam situation as another "grave escalation step" by the US.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

No major enemy contact was reported during the weekend in any of the 31 battalion-sized or larger allied ground operations conducted in South Vietnam (Para. 1). Elements of an ARVN Ranger battalion sustained heavy losses when engaged by an estimated Viet Cong company ten miles southwest of Saigon during 14-15 October (Para. 2). Viet Cong forces in Binh Thuan Province launched an apparently successful battalion-sized attack against a district headquarters on 16 October (Para. 3). Communist forces may be preparing for offensive operations against the Khe Sanh Special Forces Camp in western Quang Tri Province (Paras. 4-5). Viet Cong interdiction efforts against friendly shipping in the Rung Sat Special Zone, southeast of Saigon, has intensified sharply during the past three months (Para. 6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

During the 14 and 15 October sessions of the National Constituent Assembly two additional delegates were validated as members of the assembly, raising the total to 108, and more rapid progress made on adopting procedural rules (Paras. 2-5).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:  
Search-and-rescue operations continued without success during the weekend for the pilot of a US Navy Skyraider downed by enemy ground fire on 12 October nine miles north of Vinh (Para. 1).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:  
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: On 16 October the North Vietnamese used Secretary McNamara's optimistic appraisal of the Vietnam situation to conclude that an increase in the US effort is in the offing (Para. 1). A Polish-Soviet communiqué issued at the end of Gomulka's visit to the USSR restated the standard Communist conditions for negotiations (Para.2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. US combat forces participated in ten of the 31 battalion-sized or larger allied search-and-destroy operations conducted in South Vietnam during the past weekend. However, no major enemy contact was reported in any of these operations.

2. Elements of the 30th ARVN Ranger Battalion on a small-unit, local security search-and-destroy operation in the Capital Special Zone established heavy contact with an estimated Viet Cong company ten miles southwest of Saigon during 14-15 October. Government losses in the ensuing engagement were placed at 42 killed (one US), 37 wounded (four US), 30 missing, and 50 weapons captured. Enemy casualties were unknown.

3. Communist-initiated military activity over the weekend was highlighted by an estimated battalion-sized attack against the government's district headquarters at Thien Giao, in Binh Thuan Province, on 16 October. Thirty Vietnamese paramilitary defenders were killed and 22 wounded, against known Viet Cong losses of 17 killed and four captured.

Threat to Khe Sanh Special Forces Camp

4. The cessation of montagnard activity along Route 9 in western Quang Tri Province and an artillery strike against the airstrip of the Khe Sanh Special Forces Camp may indicate the deployment of enemy troops toward the camp for possible operations. No montagnards have been observed traveling to the Khe Sanh Market since 7 October, whereas the usual flow to market normally approximates at least 50 tribesmen per day. On 8 October an 85-mm. artillery round, believed by US Army advisers at Khe Sanh to have been fired from Laotian territory, exploded on the camp's airstrip.

5. The Khe Sanh garrison must be considered a prime target for enemy attack, since it is in an

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excellent position to monitor large-scale Communist infiltration and troop build-up efforts both through Laos and across the western flanks of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

Intensification of Viet Cong Activity in Rung Sat Special Zone

6. There has been a significant increase in the volume of small-scale Viet Cong offensive activity on the waterways of the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ), southeast of Saigon, during the past three months. From 1 July to 11 October, 18 mining incidents and 110 miscellaneous incidents consisting of small arms, recoilless rifle, and mortar fire have been recorded against friendly shipping in the area. The mining of the US merchantman Baton Rouge Victory on 23 September, the mining and sinking of a South Vietnamese Navy landing craft (LCM) on 2 October, and the mortar shelling of a US Navy LCM on 7 October were indicative of the Viet Cong capability to interdict any type of river craft or ship transiting the navigable channels of the RSSZ. In so doing, the enemy could block the main shipping channel to Saigon at the time and place of his own choosing. The 400-man 225th Amphibious Engineer Sapper Battalion is believed to be the Viet Cong unit responsible for these operations.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAMConstituent Assembly Developments

2. The 14 and 15 October sessions of the Constituent Assembly made a good deal of progress toward adopting rules which will govern assembly meetings. The assembly conducted its proceeding in a much more orderly and business-like fashion than during the hectic session of 13 October.

3. During the 14 October session rapid progress was made in the discussion and adoption of the first four chapters of the procedural rules. Debate on the first four chapters of the draft of proposed rules was completed and work started on Article V, which was partially completed by the time the session adjourned.

4. On 15 October the Credentials Committee of the Constituent Assembly validated the two additional deputies whose membership was in question. This brings the total validated assembly membership to 108. The Credentials Committee is now awaiting court decisions in the cases of the remaining nine unvalidated deputies.

5. Also during the 15 October session the members resumed discussions of the rules to govern

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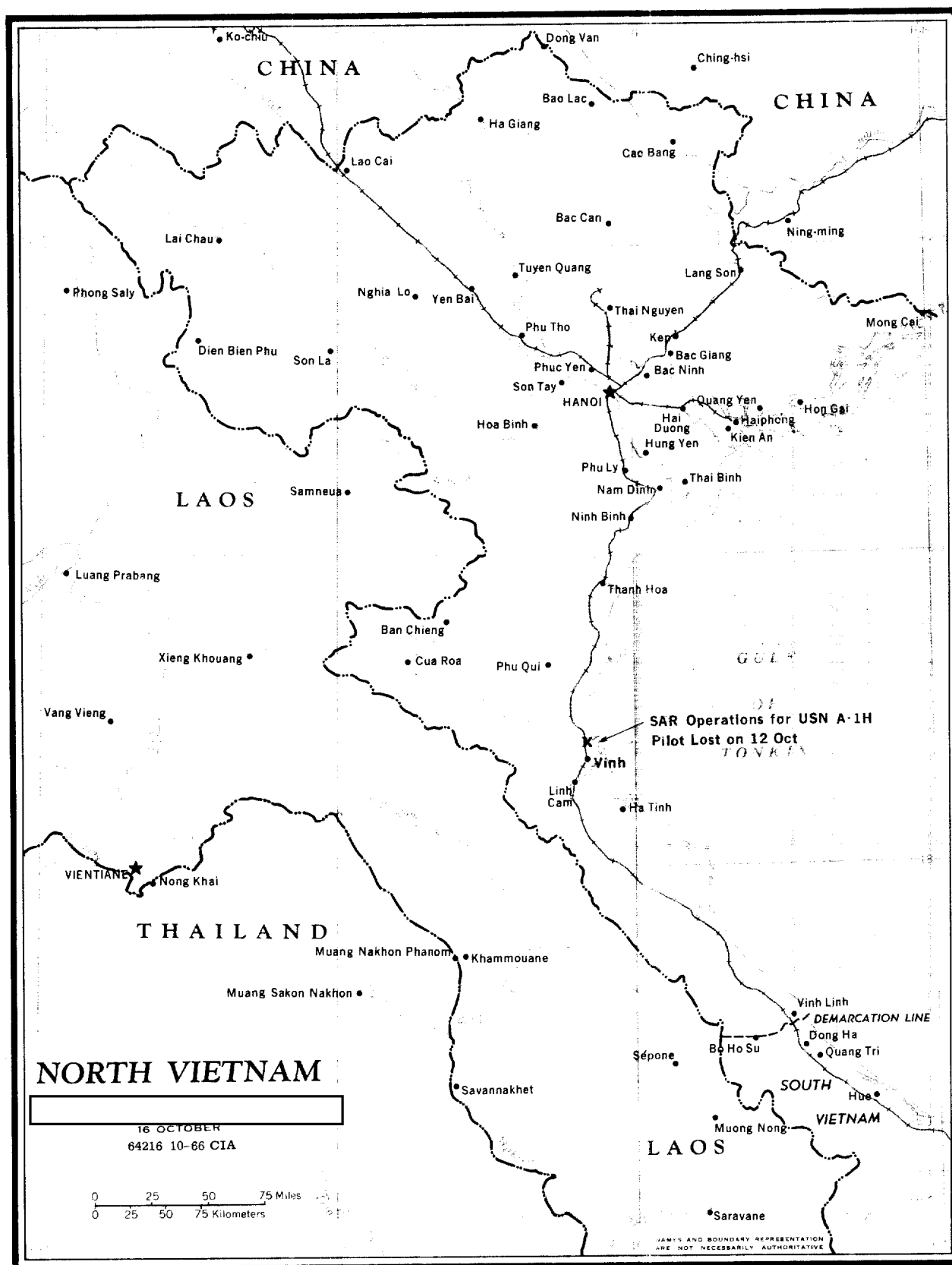
assembly procedures. One of the more important items approved was the series of articles dealing with the establishment of blocs within the assembly. According to these articles, blocs must, among other things, include at least 12 deputies; a chairman for each bloc will be elected from among its members; and deputies may belong to only one bloc. Several other articles dealing with duties of the various officers of the assembly were also passed. One draft article, number 31, which would have established the chairman of the assembly as its official spokesman, was voted down.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Search-and-rescue (SAR) operations continued without success during the weekend for the pilot of a US Navy A-1H Skyraider which was downed by enemy ground fire on 12 October while on an armed reconnaissance mission near Vinh. The pilot was at first given no chance for survival, since his plane exploded immediately upon being hit by ground fire. However, he subsequently established radio contact with friendly aircraft on 12 October and, during each period of daylight which has occurred since that initial contact, attempts have been made to extract him by helicopter. On 15 October, two SAR helicopters, with fixed-wing aircraft flying cover, landed at the downed pilot's last known location, about nine miles north of Vinh. A ground search party operating in dense jungle encountered enemy troops and killed four. During pick-up of the ground party, one helicopter was hit by ground fire and subsequently crashed at sea within 700 yards of the USS Halsey. All personnel aboard were rescued.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. In a radiobroadcast on 16 October Hanoi seized upon Secretary McNamara's optimistic appraisal of the Vietnam situation on his return from Saigon and labeled it another transparent effort which conceals a "grave escalation step." Past statements by the secretary which were eventually followed by increases in the US military effort are adduced as evidence that a further increase in the US effort is in the offing. Hanoi completes the syllogism by concluding that McNamara's hopeful assertions therefore in fact reflect the "dead-locked state, the increasingly darker and troubled situation" facing the US in Vietnam.

2. The joint Polish-Soviet communiqué issued at the conclusion of Polish party chief Gomulka's official visit to the USSR condemned US aggression in Vietnam and reiterated all the rigid demands that the US must meet. The statement spelled out the four points of the DRV and the five points of the NFLSV, starkly reinforcing the Communist conditions necessary for peace in Vietnam. The statement also accused China of encouraging US aggression in Vietnam by failing to coordinate aid to the DRV with other Communist countries and of pursuing policies contradictory to the vital interests of the socialist camp.

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